UNITED NATIONS

CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.
GENERAL

CEDAW/C/SR.261
31 January 1995

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Fourteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 261st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 16 January 1995, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. CORTI

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95-80055 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

1. The CHAIRPERSON drew the Committee's attention to the provisional agenda contained in document CEDAW/C/1995/1.

2. The agenda was adopted.

REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON ON ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BETWEEN THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH SESSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE AND CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORT OF THE FIFTH MEETING OF PERSONS CHAIRING THE HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES AND ACTION TAKEN BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONCERNING TREATY BODIES

3. The CHAIRPERSON drew attention to a list of national and international conferences and meetings which she had attended in her capacity as CEDAW Chairperson, adding that she had noted an overall improvement in the attitude towards CEDAW, as evidenced inter alia by the fact that she had been invited to speak in the plenary sessions of various United Nations bodies.

4. Drawing attention to the report of the fifth meeting of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies (A/49/537, annex), she noted that the meeting had called for the full application to women of the human rights enshrined in the international human rights instruments and had recommended that each treaty body should request States parties to include in their reports disaggregated statistical data on the situation of women under the terms of each human rights instrument. It had also recommended that human rights education should be a priority activity of the human rights treaty bodies. The proposals which were to be defined in the context of the Decade for Human Rights Education would be of great importance to CEDAW.

5. The report stressed inter alia the need for closer cooperation between treaty bodies and the specialized agencies and recommended that the latter should consider inviting experts from treaty bodies to participate in their general conferences; it also recommended that CEDAW should consider the possibility of changing its working methods or amending its rules of procedure in order to allow non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to participate more fully in its activities (para. 41).

6. The report contained for the first time, a separate section devoted to the issue of providing adequate resources for the effective functioning of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (paras. 49 to 51), an acknowledgement of the fact that the problems facing CEDAW, particularly the lack of resources and the lack of adequate secretariat support (para. 50), were more serious than those facing other human rights treaty bodies. The chairpersons felt that CEDAW should no longer be separated from the mainstream of the other human rights activities and that it should be based at the United Nations Office at Geneva (para. 50).

7. The Committee and the Centre for Human Rights had been exchanging information on a regular basis. The "focal point" appointed by the Centre for

Human Rights to serve as its liaison with the Division for the Advancement of Women had assisted her during the meeting of chairpersons. She was of the view that that relationship would be much more effective if it were established on a permanent basis. The Centre was to issue a publication on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and on CEDAW, which had been revised by the Division and on the basis of her own comments. CEDAW had been invited by all treaty bodies to participate in public meetings. The Committee must request information from the Centre on the functioning and financing of working groups of treaty bodies. Information had also been received on a regular basis by CEDAW experts appointed to follow the work of different treaty bodies.

8. She had made every effort to establish closer cooperation with the specialized agencies of the United Nations. A meeting with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had provided the first opportunity for such cooperation; unfortunately, as funding had been extremely limited only five CEDAW experts had been able to participate. A joint document would be issued highlighting the basic principles and ethics of the two bodies, in particular, their belief in education as a fundamental human right of girls and women, and as a tool for the progress of society and for a new culture of equality. A core manifesto on the theme "Towards a gender-inclusive culture through education" had been drafted and would soon be submitted to the Committee for approval. Its purpose was to promote equality at all levels of education for girls and women. UNICEF had also expressed a willingness to undertake concrete cooperation, as had several other agencies but as yet nothing had been done. As for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), it had financed her participation in the International Conference on Population and Development, for which she was very grateful. The Executive Director of UNFPA had been invited to attend a meeting of the Committee.

9. She attached particular importance to the Committee's cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), particularly the International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW), which, from the outset, had promoted awareness of the Convention and which provided regular reports to the Committee. She also expressed gratitude to the International Human Rights Law Group, which had mobilized funding for the organization of a seminar in Maastricht. The seminar had been attended by the world's leading experts on the Convention and had produced a draft optional protocol to the Convention, which the Committee should proceed forthwith to consider. Together with the report on progress achieved in the implementation of the Convention, the draft optional protocol would be CEDAW's best contribution to the upcoming Fourth World Conference on Women, and would give Governments an opportunity to demonstrate whether they had the political will needed to move towards a new policy of equality.

10. Reporting on the recent International Conference on Population and Development, she said that it had revealed, inter alia, that millions of women in developing countries still died from preventable childbirth-related causes. The Conference had challenged the world to put women's human rights on the world agenda and to view reproductive rights and health care as human rights. The Conference had attributed great importance to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Committee on the Elimination

of Discrimination against Women was expected to follow up the Plan of Action adopted at the Conference.

11. Given the growing numbers of instances of civil strife and economic crises all of which produced increasing numbers of refugees, most of whom were women and children, the Committee should elaborate a General Recommendation regarding women refugees, and examine measures for the protection of their human rights.

12. Noting that the United Nations Decade for Human Rights education had just begun, she pointed out that the High Commissioner for Human Rights had stressed that special attention would be given during the Decade to the issue of gender equality. A global campaign, using videos, pamphlets and workshops was to be launched in Beijing to promote awareness of the Convention and of CEDAW. The Scandinavia Governments had already earmarked funds for that purpose. In addition, a book on CEDAW and on the Convention and its legal impact had been published in Tokyo by the Japanese Association of International Women's Rights. The Committee had a leading role to play in making women around the world aware of their rights and of the instruments that existed for their protection.

13. Ms. CARTWRIGHT and Ms. SINEGIORGIS noting that the workload borne by the Chairperson would continue to increase because of efforts to mainstream women's issues in the general human rights work of the United Nations, wondered whether the Chairperson received sufficient clerical and financial support in her work and travel.

14. Ms. GARCIA-PRINCE said that there were two ways of interpreting the mandate of a human rights treaty body such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. A narrow interpretation would mean that the Committee's work would be restricted to the consideration and follow-up of reports submitted by States parties to the Convention. A broader interpretation would enrich the work of the Committee, connecting it with the work of other bodies, and enabling it to broaden and strengthen the application of the Convention. She hoped that the secretariat would provide some information regarding budgetary limitations arising out of decisions of the Economic and Social Council and of the General Assembly.

15. The CHAIRPERSON said she hoped to clarify the question of whether the Secretariat of the United Nations could be expected to provide her with any help during the year, adding that there had been some difficulty with the financing of her participation on behalf of the Committee in certain events.

16. Ms. SHALEV expressed shock at the Chairperson's statement and noted that the Committee needed more information from the Secretariat concerning the way other human rights bodies were funded and regarding the activities undertaken by their chairpersons.

17. Ms. SINEGIORGIS noted that the services provided to the Committee by the Secretariat were frequently substandard; that in itself, could be taken as a reflection of the low status accorded to women. In order to give the issue the importance it deserved, she requested that the Secretariat submit a report to the Committee.

18. Ms. BERNARD said that it would be illuminating to find out about the experiences of chairpersons of other human rights bodies outside their committees.

19. Mr. MATHIASON (Deputy Director, Division for the Advancement of Women) said that the facilities and staff that were made available to the Committee were determined by its mandate, as outlined in article 21 of the Convention. While acknowledging that the Committee was indeed disadvantaged in terms of its short meeting time, he pointed out that, in accordance with article 17 of the Convention, Committee members received emoluments that were determined and approved by the General Assembly. As was the case with chairpersons of other human rights bodies, the Chairperson received a slightly higher amount to enable her to carry out her additional functions. The secretariat servicing CEDAW was no larger nor smaller than the secretariats servicing other human rights bodies, and its role was identical, namely to provide information, facilitate the exchange of information and prepare reports. On the subject of travel, practice with regard to CEDAW was no different from the practice applied to similar treaty bodies. The General Assembly provided a travel and daily subsistence allowance on the basis of the mandate as defined by the relevant instrument. Money for travel by chairpersons to various conferences in the execution of their mandates was appropriated on the basis of specific legislative requests. However, the Secretariat could only ask for the resources that had been recommended, and thus the system of requests was not very flexible. In practice, the Secretariat funded that kind of activity using savings that had been made elsewhere.

20. He offered to speak on the topic of finances in more detail at the working group, but warned that his answers would not be substantially different. With regard to the servicing provided to the Chairperson, the Secretariat was happy to do whatever clerical and secretarial work it could from New York.

21. Ms. TALLAWY said that when Committee members asked for the Secretariat's help they did not expect to have articles of the Convention quoted at them. Everybody knew there was a de jure and a de facto situation. The Convention provided a purely legal basis and a broad outline. The situation had changed over the years and the Committee's workload had increased substantially. Women's issues had assumed a far higher profile in recent years and, following various international conferences on women's matters, there had been a widespread change in attitude. That change should be reflected in the treatment accorded to the Committee. Every year the Secretariat should assess what the Chairperson's obligations were in light of the annual programme of work and submit a request for the necessary funds. For the Chairperson and members of the Committee travel was not simply a matter of choice, but an obligation.

22. She stressed the need for flexibility. Under the current system, attendance at a conference by the chairperson of a human rights body was conditional on the decision of the Secretariat depending on the resources available. She suggested that the whole issue of expenses should be referred to the General Assembly.

23. Ms. AOUIJ pointed out that women's rights were an integral part of human rights; since the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action had called for

strengthening coordination and cooperation between human rights bodies, it was inevitable that CEDAW's mandate would expand. At a recent meeting of the Third Committee, the High Commissioner for Human Rights had reaffirmed the importance of all the human rights bodies, including CEDAW, and had promised to strengthen them within the United Nations system itself. That promise represented an undertaking by all States to strengthen the Committee's work. Accordingly the Committee should seek to take advantage of that spirit of goodwill in order to resolve its financial difficulties.

24. She concluded by noting that the Secretariat did not provide documents in the working languages of some of the members of the Committee, which complicated their work still further.

25. Ms. GARCIA-PRINCE suggested that the Committee should ask the Division for the Advancement of Women to submit a request for more resources to the Commission on the Status of Women, citing the increase in the Committee's workload.

26. Ms. ESTRADA CASTILLO pointed out that, according to rule 3, paragraph 2 of the rules of procedure, the Committee could meet at other places than those specified in the rules of procedure, and that, under article 17 of the Convention the Secretary-General was required to provide the Committee with the necessary staff and facilities for the effective performance of its functions. She agreed that any request for additional financial resources should be made through the Division for the Advancement of Women.

STATEMENT BY THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

27. Ms. COOMARASWAMY (Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women) said that in the discharge of her mandate, she had already undertaken field missions to each of the five major geopolitical regions of the world, and had also requested from Governments information on violence in the family and community and violence by the State, specifically with regard to the observance of international standards, national legislative practices, relevant court cases, training programmes for the police and judiciary and special programmes for women victims of violence, including the provision of shelters and community support systems. Some 29 States had thus far replied, as had a large number of non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies had also responded.

28. The framework for her discussions would remain the international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. She had submitted a preliminary report to the Commission on Human Rights for consideration at its fifty-first session.

29. With regard to her cooperation with the Committee, it would be useful if the data on violence against women contained in country reports could be brought to her attention. A mechanism should be set up within the Division for the Advancement of Women to forward such data to her as part of the Division's normal processing of country reports and other documents. She would also

welcome advance notice of country reports to be submitted to the Committee so that she could encourage the Governments concerned to include information on violence against women.

30. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed the Special Rapporteur's proposals for cooperation with the Committee which would prove to be an objective source of information.

31. Ms. TALLAWY drew attention to the recent resurgence of violence against women in times of armed conflict and civil strife, noting that the events in Bosnia and Herzegovina provided a particularly chilling example of women being used as instruments of war. In the discharge of her mandate, the Special Rapporteur should also refer to the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflicts.

32. Another cause of concern was the growing phenomenon of the forced prostitution of women by organized criminal gangs, especially in the Far East. The Special Rapporteur should also turn her attention to that new development.

33. Ms. AOUIJ said that, in some Muslim countries, custom dictated that violence against women within families should remain a taboo subject. It was time to lift the veil of secrecy and expose that practice. It would also be helpful if the Special Rapporteur reported to the Committee as well as to the Commission on Human Rights.

34. Ms. BUSTELO GARCIA DEL REAL, after expressing confidence that the Special Rapporteur would have the full support of the Committee as well as from members in their individual capacities, pointed out that the Special Rapporteur, like the Committee, faced the problem of inadequate budgetary resources for the discharge of her mandate. In fact, her support services consisted of a single person in Geneva.

35. Ms. COOMARASWAMY (Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women) thanked the Committee for the solidarity it had expressed and pledged to work closely with its members, noting that a mechanism must be set up in the Division for the Advancement of Women to facilitate the desired cooperation.

36. With regard to the budget, she said that she did receive an allocation from the Economic and Social Council to carry out her work, including field trips, although the appropriation was not entirely adequate.

37. Ms. TALLAWY pointed out that any request for additional resources for the Committee should also cover the work of the Special Rapporteur. It was frustrating that a Committee whose task it was to combat discrimination against women was itself the object of discrimination in so far as the allocation of resources was concerned. That situation was unacceptable and should be brought to the attention of both the Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Secretary-General of the Organization.

38. Ms. ABAKA said that the Committee must take advantage of the favourable climate that existed prior to the World Conference to find an effective solution to the problem of resources. A similar opportunity might never present itself again.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.